

## OCOTILLO WELLS DISTRICT

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# Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 2

APRIL - OCTOBER 2018

## The Winds of Change

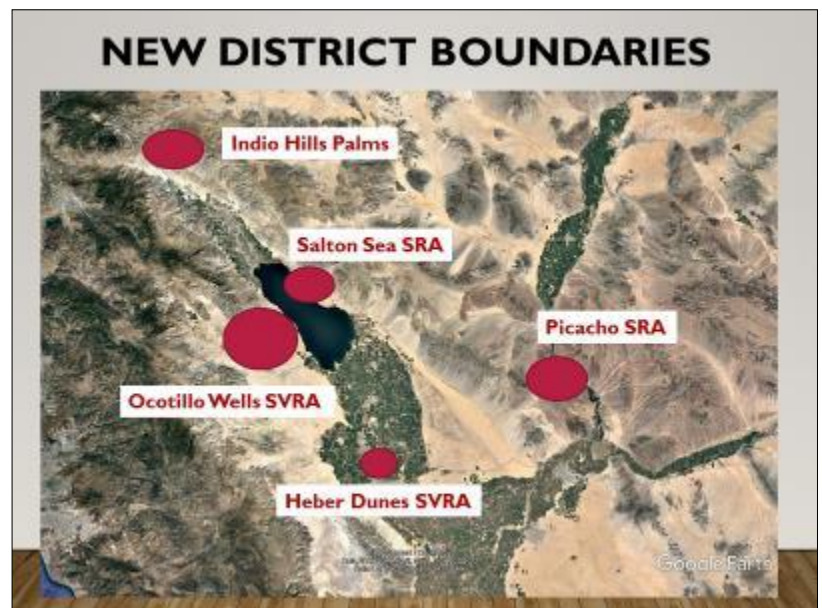
By Steve Quartieri, Interim District Superintendent

The summer was full of exciting changes and new opportunities in the Ocotillo Wells District. During August, members of the Department of the Parks and Recreation Executive Team joined the Ocotillo Wells District Team to learn more about how the State Park Transformation will change the District's organization and operation in the future. Meeting attendees received an update from our State Parks Director, Lisa Mangat, our District Superintendent Garratt Aitchison, as well as each Program Manager. Presentations included information about the transformation process that guided us to this point, our newly acquired park units, and the additional career opportunities created statewide.

One big change we will experience in the District is the transfer of three park units from the Colorado Desert District to the Ocotillo Wells District.

These units include Salton Sea SRA, Picacho SRA and Indio Hills Palms. Each of these units has a variety of resources and dedicated team members that we are lucky to inherit as part of the transfer. Although the formal hand-off of the newly acquired park units has not

occurred, the Ocotillo Wells and Colorado Desert District Teams are already working collaboratively to share information about our new park units, including



## The Winds of Change *continued...*

past operational practices, future management efforts, as well as planning for upcoming projects slated for these units. We are excited to have Salton Sea SRA, Picacho SRA, and Indio Hills Palms join the OW team.

A second key element in our reorganizational discussion was the switch to a programmatic management model where each core program will have a dedicated manager who will oversee all districtwide operations within their service area. In the Ocotillo Wells District, we will have six program areas: Administrative Services, Public Safety, Resources (Cultural & Natural), Interpretation & Education, Facilities Management, and Community Engagement.

Lastly, another big change for the District was announced a couple weeks after the meeting. Our District Superintendent of five years, Garratt Aitchison, announced he will be leaving OW to take on the challenges of the District Superintendent position at the San Diego Coast District, effective September 1<sup>st</sup>. The District Team will miss his calm, fair leadership style. Garratt guided the District through several major projects, including Service Based Budgeting, Reorganization of District Boundaries, and the General Plan, just to name a few. There is no question—Garratt has left a lasting mark on the District and all of us will miss him!



In the interim, I am truly honored to fulfill the duties of the District Superintendent until the permanent selection process is completed. I joined the Ocotillo Wells team in 2007. During my 10+ years at OW, I have had the pleasure of managing a variety of programs, including interpretation, natural resources, cultural resources, and community engagement. I have also had the pleasure of getting to know many of our visitors and stakeholders. It is those experiences, coupled with the highly-talented team at OW, which makes me truly excited about being our team leader.

As your interim District Superintendent, my focus will be to welcome and integrate our new park units, implement the programmatic management model in the District, set clear district and program goals, increase teamwork, and most importantly, continue to build on the solid foundation created by our past District Superintendent.

# Celebrating Our Earth...

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

## ...a Day for “Serious” Fun!

A few of our young Ocotillo Wells off-road visitors celebrated Earth Day in different ways last April. With several activities to choose from, some donned safety vests, and with trash pickers in hand, patrolled the Discovery Center area searching for litter and debris. Others dropped by the Discovery Center to make special craft projects such as Earth Day picture frames and “Go Green” suncatchers. Some chose to patrol their own campgrounds in search of nails and other objects left behind by other not-so-responsible campers.

The Junior Rangers who participated took the meaning of Earth Day seriously and did what they needed to do to make their park a cleaner, safer and more enjoyable place to recreate! Not just for themselves and their families, but for everyone who comes to this special place!





# Interpretive Staff Reaches Out!

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

Fall marks the start of the off-road desert-riding season. OHV enthusiasts attend numerous shows and expos in the area that feature the latest and greatest in off-road recreation, including vehicles, safety gear, equipment and parts. Ocotillo Wells Interpretation Department attended the Orange County Sand Sports Super Show, September 14 -16, in Costa Mesa, and the Lucas Oil Off-Road Expo, September 29 - 30 in Pomona. Interpretive staff interacted with over 7,400 attendees during the five show days.

Staff answered many questions about the different types of riding Ocotillo Wells has to offer, park destinations, park rules and regulations, and general camping guidelines. Attendees were also very interested in the park's upcoming interpretive special event line-up for this season, such as Critter Olympics, Hot Stars and Heavenly Bodies, Geology Days, and Bug-a-Palooza.



The Gnarly Beasts of the Past exhibit, with stories about the ancient animals who roamed the Borrego Valley, was wildly popular. This year's star of the show was the Megalodon shark. What off-road enthusiast would not love the story of a giant predatory shark that was as big as a school bus, ate large marine mammals for lunch and had 276 teeth spanning 5 rows! As visitors moved through "time,"

they were able to look closely at the skulls and skins of modern day animals that call Ocotillo Wells home, including the coyote, bobcat and badger. Everyone loved being able to touch a real animal pelt and to see what the animals' skulls looked like.

Visitors to the shows loved to be able to take away park maps, resource guides, and trading cards to help them research the park and their upcoming visit. In addition, all of the shows were awesome opportunities to reach out to the off-road community, promote safe riding and Tread Lightly! Principles, and encourage usage of their state parks.

# The Tarantula!

By Cate Blanch, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

Though they've been featured in Hollywood movies and are the stars of many scary stories, the heroes of this article aren't terrifying creatures who go "bump" in the night. Tarantulas have unjustly earned a bad reputation, and now that the weather is cooling off here at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, it's time to spot those "terrifying tarantulas" trouncing about!

These crawly critters are hard to spot except during this rare period of the year. October through December is mating season for these sneaky spideys you'll spot wandering past the ocotillo in the desert washes and on the coquina mounds as the males look for a female to woo. But worry not! These desert arachnids are nothing to fear. The male tarantula you may spot meandering the desert has lived between 5-10 years, and will be walking almost 50 miles in the next six weeks looking for a lady love. Hopefully, the fellow comes across a burrow covered in silk, where his leading lady awaits!

If she's home in her burrow, he'll tap on the silk threads to see if she's home. Our lady has been living out in the wild for 20-30 years and has been awaiting our gent to pay her a visit. She'll invite our hero into her burrow where they'll dance their romantic Tarantella. Hopefully our leading man has chosen a kind leading lady, and afterwards she'll allow him to depart on another adventure. However, she may be a villain instead, and wind up making a dinner of our star! What an end to our hero's journey!

No need to worry about a tarantula taking a bite out of people though! They may look scary, but tarantulas are very shy and docile—don't believe those scary Hollywood movies! These little guys you see here in Ocotillo Wells are timid and will try to run if they can—they're not aggressive at all! Only if put under duress would these little fellows bite, and even then it would only feel like a bee sting! While their venom is effective to help them eat insects—keeping the insect populations down—tarantula bites are generally considered harmless to humans, so don't believe what the movies say about these cute creepy crawlies!



Though there's no need to worry about a tarantula bite, when they're scared, our crawly stars do have special urticating hairs they can fling at attackers. These hairs cause some serious itching, so while there's no need to fear a deadly bite, if you try to handle them, you'll be scratching for days. So, please enjoy their amazing journey across the deserts of Ocotillo Wells from afar, and allow our heroes to find their leading ladies in peace!



# Trails Team Has Fun While Learning ...

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

The Trails Team took a break from their busy workday schedule to learn about The Tread Lightly! RC (remote control) vehicle program, which has become one of the most popular interpretive programs the park offers. Interpretive staff presented information on the history and purpose of the program, future special event ideas, and possible new features and obstacles for the track.

The RC program is based on the Tread Lightly! program, which emphasizes the following



The team especially enjoyed running the jeeps through the challenging course since several of the current staff were instrumental in actually constructing the obstacles. For the newer staff this opportunity gave them some ideas and inspiration for new obstacles to incorporate in the future!

principals: **T**ravel responsibly, **R**espect the rights of others, **E**ducate yourself, **A**void sensitive areas, and **D**o your part. The RC course, located behind the Discovery Center, offers visitors of all ages the chance to explore the manmade features that include a bridge, hairpin turns, tunnels and other challenges either with their own rigs or with the RC vehicles available during the Tread Lightly! afternoon RC events.



(Continued on next page...)

## ... About the Tread Lightly! Principles



## Meet Claire ...

Ranger Claire Evans is from Northern California and graduated from the State Park Peace Officer Academy in June. She has her Bachelor's degree in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration. She enjoys paddle boarding and playing miniature golf while vacationing in her favorite place, Lake Tahoe. She and her 7-year-old son are enjoying their new desert lifestyle.



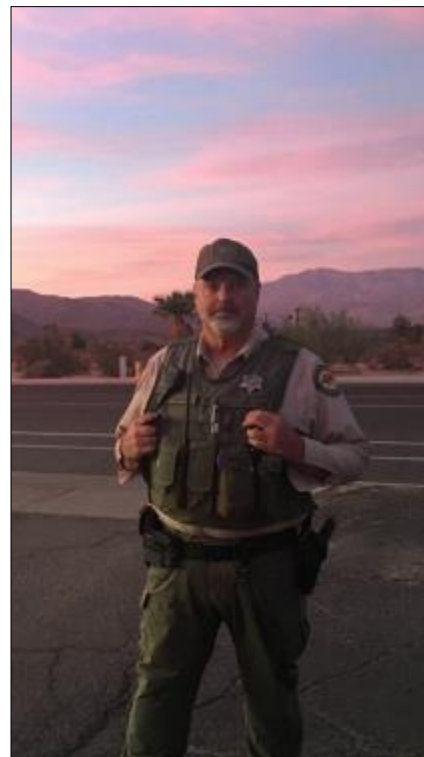
## Meet Tim ...

Tim Hayden recently transferred to OWSVRA from Will Rogers State Historic Park in Los Angeles. For the past eighteen years, Ranger Tim was assigned to Angeles District, and has worked all the State Park units in LA, Topanga and Malibu.

A native Angeleno, Ranger Tim is excited about moving to Borrego Springs. His family came to Campo more than one hundred years ago, and ran the hotel at Buckman Springs. When it burned down in 1921, his late grandfather barely escaped with his life! Subsequently, the family moved to Vista, where his father was originally from.

Ranger Tim is a former Army paratrooper and infantry officer, and has a bachelor's degree in Sociology. Tim is married to Jane, and has an adult daughter from his previous marriage, along with Jane's son and daughter.

Ranger Tim hiked through the area on the Pacific Crest Trail in 1993, and loves to cook.



## Meet Becca ...

Hello Ocotillo Wells! I, Becca Miller, am one of the new seasonal interpreters at the park and am excited to be here. On my off time you can find me hiking, exploring a new spot, jogging, playing board games, or just doing some good ol' porch-sitting. I love the desert (yay to skipping brutal Iowa winters!), and am looking forward to discovering more about this gorgeous part of the state. The history, natural beauty, and recreational opportunities this park offers are a killer combo, and I am loving interpreting it for our visitors!





# Friends of Ocotillo Wells



By Andrew Ahlberg, Public Safety Superintendent/Chief Ranger

Friends of Ocotillo Wells, or FOW as it is commonly known, has been a huge help over the last ten years in their support of our operations. While they support all of our programs, the main purpose is to support the interpretive programs here in the park. They help pay for those items that the Department cannot legally buy. The best example I can think of, not because it is a spectacular event, but because it is consistent and something that I know many visitors enjoy, is the "Coffee with a Ranger" program. Without FOW's support to pay for the supplies, this program would not happen. FOW helps throughout the year by purchasing supplies for Junior Rangers, Spooktacular, and most any event in which there are giveaways.

For the last ten plus years, Jan Chaney has been at the helm of FOW as the President. At the last meeting Jan stepped down as president, but will be staying involved to help FOW transition to the new leadership. Congratulations to Ed Stovin, who was elected as the new President. I thank Jan Chaney for her 10 years of service as President of the Ocotillo Wells SVRA Cooperating Association, Friends of Ocotillo Wells, and wish Ed luck in his new role.

At the last meeting, FOW decided to clarify its role by writing a mission statement. Several versions were discussed, some long versions that tried to cover all aspects of how FOW helps the park. In the end, a short, simple, to the point mission statement was developed and approved by the board. The mission of Friends of Ocotillo Wells is:

"Helping California State Parks provide for safe and enjoyable experiences at Ocotillo Wells SVRA."

I think that this mission statement fits well. Thank you to all the volunteers that give their time to help Friends of Ocotillo Wells continue to meet its mission.

## Meet Jared ...

Hello, my name is Jared Gravett, and I am working with Resources. I grew up in Riverside and recently graduated from Arlington High school. In summer 2017, I volunteered with the Resources surveys, and in 2018 I joined the Resources team as a Park Aide. I love snakes, lizards, and beetles.



# Maintenance Management

By Brian Woodson, Park Maintenance Chief I



← Victor Garcia and Carlos Gales drill fence postholes at the 4x4 Training Area last April to complete a fencing project.



Dan Christensen and Mike Rose tag team the effort to remove sand drifts along Poleline Road back in April.



← Chris Dahl checks the dry fit for the replacement coupler to fix a water main break here at the District complex back in May.

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## Maintenance Management *continued...*



Richard Gutierrez works with Larry Grosse to cut some pipe pieces for the water main repair project



Chris makes the final connection with the telescoping coupling



And the final look...



Last hike (Slot Canyon) with the Trails crew before their season ends for the summer.



# Maintenance Management

By Alfredo Jacobo, Park Maintenance Supervisor



The Maintenance Department was busy during the brutal summer months.



← Jeff Smith, Park Maintenance Worker I, made multiple floor repairs this summer. Here, he works on the floor in the Resources building.



Before



After

Electrical pedestal repair, involving the 50 amp and 30 amp receptacles, completed by Chris Dahl, Park Maintenance Worker I

*(Continued on next page...)*

# Maintenance Management *continued...*



Corey Ingersoll, Park Maintenance Worker II, and Richard Gutierrez, Seasonal Maintenance Aide, work on a water leak by the District Garden.

All Maintenance employees received aerial lift training at Heber Dunes SVRA. The training was provided by Mike Willies, Heavy Equipment Operator, from the Sacramento District.

Holly Lawson, Park Maintenance Assistant, stands on the lift. ➡



# Heber Dunes Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

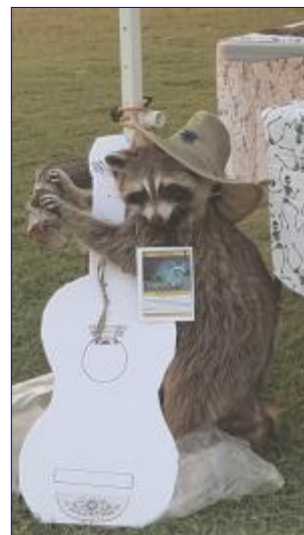
## What will you discover at Heber Dunes today?

### Winding down or gearing up?

The school year—not unlike the off-road season—begins to slowly wind down as warm spring mornings transition into lazy summer days. Heber's Afterschool Junior Rangers, though, are just getting started with some of their most favorite activities. What exactly are the Junior Rangers' favorite activities? Check out this season's Junior Ranger list of accomplishments to find out!

### Accomplishments:

- ◆ Learned the Junior Ranger Promise in English and Spanish; applied what we learned; and earned our official Junior Ranger badges and certificates and some nifty project stickers (see below).
- ◆ Bear shared lots of great observations and created a really long list of questions on the "I wonder" board.
- ◆ Met Dirt Boy, Thelma Gratch, and Clark the Shark, then wondered how a creature with no arms could write down all these adventures in the Diary of a Worm.
- ◆ Earned project stickers for participating in Shark Week, getting down and dirty with soil science, creating "dirty rotten stink'n" stories about Nature's Recyclers, participating in the Lost Lady Bug citizen science project, and contributing to a cleaner school by collecting and recycling plastic bottles the entire school year.
- ◆ Discovered the difference between live (real: raccoon mount) and pretend (fake: cartoon Rocket) wild animals when we played "Believe it or not," then researched an animal or its animatronic/ cartoon equivalent and presented the results to the group.
- ◆ McKinley Junior Rangers practiced patience and perseverance as they turned a garden full of Bermuda grass into three great science experiments, while learning about limiting factors, pest and pollinators, soil science, and especially how much



(Continued on next page...)



# Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*



work—and how many tomatoes and peppers—it takes to grow a jar of salsa!

- ◆ Researched ladybugs, counted ladybugs, painted ladybug rocks, and played aphid ladybug until there were no aphids left.
- ◆ Cub cadets (1st & 2nd graders) learned about flight by looking at a bird's wing and making paper airplanes. Cubs worked hard at getting along with others and working together. They learned that scientists can be rangers and that rangers can be scientists, and that—with lots of hard work—they can be both!
- ◆ Everybody got to work together and make solar ovens for the annual award celebration.
- ◆ Learned that not everyone has the same abilities but that doesn't mean they do not have something important to contribute.
- ◆ Discovered what it takes to be a leader, and how to work together as a team.
- ◆ Had lots of fun!

By the time those lazy days of summer had arrived, 96 newly-minted Junior Rangers and 14 Cub Cadets had set off to new adventures. I wonder what they will discover at Heber Dunes?



*(Continued on next page...)*

# Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

## Creature Features

Skins, scats, and skulls, as well as ladybugs and worms, were all the rage this spring and fall. Heber Dunes took its show on the road in April to the annual Children's Fair and then again for fall festivals at Calipatria State Prison and Heber's Tito Huerta Park. If it was "ooey" and "goeey," the consensus was—Don't eat it!

Not to be out done, the Afterschool Junior Rangers began the new school year by learning the chicken dance and then trying to teach it to a robot chicken. This was almost as difficult as building your own scarecrow out of trash or scaring the zombies out of the ghostly garden. Better look out for that venus fly trap and the really big spider!



## And that's not all folks!

Don't miss the yummy septic stew recipe that Martin and the Heber Maintenance crew are cooking up. The rumor going round is that tamarisk roots are a main ingredient. It may be a little on the salty side though!

## Meet Cate ...

Hello all! I'm Cate Blanch, and I'm excited to be here at Ocotillo Wells as a member of the Interpretation Team as a Senior Park Aide! I'm having a blast getting to know everyone and learning all about the fascinating history and ecology of Ocotillo Wells. I'm an avid hiker and love experiencing the outdoors whenever I can, (I've especially been enjoying the beautiful starry skies here!) and enjoy doodling comics and cartoons as well! If you see me roaming about, come and say hi!



# The Darkling Beetle

By Jared Gravett, Park Aide, Resources

Darkling beetle is the common name of beetles within the large Tenebrionidae family. The number of species in the darkling beetle family is estimated at more than 20,000. Darkling beetles feed on decaying plant and animal matter. They also eat live plants, buds, fruit, fungi and grains. Natural enemies of darkling beetles are lizards, rodents, spiders, birds, and large beetles.

The lifecycle of darkling beetles has four stages. Female darkling beetles lay eggs, which hatch into tiny mealworms during the larval stage. The mealworms eat a lot and shed their exoskeletons numerous times as they grow. Eventually, the mealworm enters the pupal stage, during which it doesn't eat and appears inactive. After that, they emerge as darkling beetles and can live for just a few months or up to 15 years depending on the species and environmental factors, such as climate and food availability.

In Ocotillo Wells, darkling beetles can be seen throughout the park. Interestingly, darkling beetles are entirely ground dwelling as their wings are fused over their back. They can frequently be seen walking around the desert floor, but when startled, they will either play dead or move into a "headstand" position. From this position, they can use a chemical defense and emit a bad smelling fluid to defend themselves against predators, which is why they are sometimes called "stink beetles."



Adult darkling beetle

Photo by M.F. Keller



Mealworm larva

Photo by cal.s.uidaho.edu



# October Showers...Bring November Flowers?

By Becca Miller, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

After the deluge we got here at Ocotillo Wells in early October, many of our plants perked up a bit! Our ocotillos turned green with the budding of their leaves, with a few shooting out beautiful red flowers. The creosote bushes brightened up and bloomed. Something we weren't



Seedlings that have not flowered

expecting to see were the appearance of some of our ephemeral wildflowers. The first ones we spotted in the field were the dusty teal leaves of the desert lily. Once we saw one, we noticed them in fairly good numbers! They looked good, and we had our fingers crossed that we would see flower stalks appear on them in a week or two.

In the meantime we noticed other flowers pop up, like the asters and Woolly Daisy, along with more low-lying greenery. Who would have thought, getting wildflowers in November? What a treat to see blooms this late in the year! Re-visiting arguably the prettiest-desert-flower-of-OW, the desert lily, we

saw decay in the leaves and no signs of a stalk coming forth, except for one lily found in bloom in Tectonic Gorge. What does this mean for our desert lilies? Perhaps they thought it was spring with the amount of water we received and didn't anticipate the colder temperatures. The unseasonable amount of water was enough to confuse our desert plants, usually timed perfectly with the small amount of rain we do receive here (less than 3" annually).



Sandpaper Plant (*Petalonyx thurberi*)



Desert lily in Tectonic Gorge in mid November



Eriogonum sp.

Our wildflowers need good rain in the fall, along with a good rain in the spring, to get serious numbers of blooms. Seeing these flowers now makes us wonder, will we see them in the spring? Will this intense amount of rain in October be setting up plants for a large bloom in the spring, if we get the water we need in the mean time? Either way, we were happy to enjoy their rare presence here this early winter, and will put this season in the phenology books under the category "kinda really weird."

# OW's Annual Halloween Spooktacular! Event

By Becca Miller, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

This year at Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area, Halloween was ushered in with our Halloween Spooktacular event. It was a busy weekend with many visitors camping in the park and enjoying the trails, and many of them joined us for the festivities in costume on the night of October 27<sup>th</sup>. This was the fourth year of Spooktacular, and it's proving to be one of the more popular events held at Ocotillo Wells throughout the season.



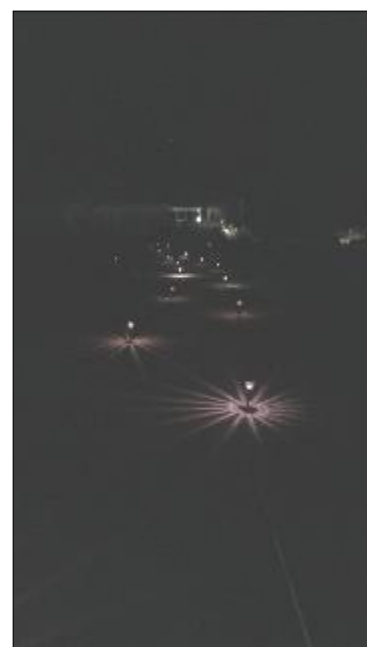
We offered interpretive programs, like the ever popular Bombastic Bats where we listen real-time to bats feeding and learn about the 26 species that visit our park. The Scorpion Safari taught our visitors that scorpions are evolutionary kings and ended with a search for them

using UV blacklights. Along with providing the opportunity to learn about our Halloween themed desert creatures, the local folklore was front and center with tall tales about our infamous Dead Edgar.

The visitors also enjoyed trick-or-treating, the haunted house, and s'mores while attending this year. We heard many returning



visitors asking if the scorpions were going to be bigger, if the scares were going to be worse/better (depending on who was asking), and if the candy was indeed going to run out. For all the work it was to put up the decorations and put this event on, everybody can agree that the genuine interest in our desert animals and the shrieks of horror accompanied immediately with wide grins were completely worth it. Thank you to everybody who helped make this event possible!



# Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect. Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

[www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA](https://www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA)

California State Parks supports equal access. Please call ahead for special needs accommodation.

For more information, contact

Ocotillo Wells SVRA, 5172 Highway 78, Borrego Springs, CA 92004  
(760) 767-5393, or 711, TTY relay service

## Events at Ocotillo Wells

Kids Adventure Connection!  
Hot Stars and Heavenly Bodies Astronomy Festival  
Geology Daze! Geology Festival  
Bug-a-palooza Bug Festival  
Eggs-travaganza

January 19-20, 2019  
January 26, 2019  
February 16-18, 2019  
March 23-24, 2019  
April 6, 2019



### Ocotillo Wells District

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